

External Evaluation Report

Two Year Master's Programme 'Theory
and Practice of Human Rights',
University of Oslo, Norway

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Introduction

In December 2015 a committee of seven members was appointed to conduct a review of the MA programme in Theory and Practice of Human Rights offered by the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights at the University of Oslo, Norway. This two-year postgraduate programme attracts a broad and diverse cohort of students interested in gaining not only an academic qualification in human rights but also practical experience in the field.

The review is based on the 25 November 2015 internal evaluation report that was sent to the Committee, information gleaned on the website of the programme and, crucially, answers given by the programme managers to questions sent by the Committee. The members of the Committee would like to thank the programme managers for their cooperation and the time and effort spent in answering very comprehensively these questions.

The Committee was required to conduct a SWOT analysis of the programme and 'provide critique as well as thoughts and ideas on how the programme can be improved'. With this view, each member of the Committee made initially a list of the five key strengths and five key weaknesses of the programme. As the members of the Committee were situated in different countries, they worked via emails. This enabled the Committee to agree on what worked well and not so well in the programme and seed thoughts about the opportunities and threats. Subsequently, to gain further insights into the programme a set of 25 questions was sent by the Committee in February 2016 to the programme managers. Indeed, clarification on some issues was needed to assist the members of the Committee to understand not only how the programme worked in practice but also some of the practical and financial constraints relating to the programme which would affect the Committee's recommendations. A draft structure of the sections 'Strengths' and 'Weaknesses' of the report was circulated and commented upon by Committee members. Later, emails were exchanged on the opportunities and threats in order to give shape to the second part of the report. The report was eventually written by the Chair of the Committee and circulated for comments. The report was then submitted on 31 March 2016. Following further information sent by the managers of the programme, email exchanges between committee members and a phone conversation between the Chair of the Committee and the Director of the Programme a revised version was submitted on 21 May 2016.

Summary of Observations and Concluding Recommendations

Strengths

- Programme clearly geared towards providing students with an overview of human rights issues, espousing a multidisciplinary approach.
- Carefully thought-out structure imparting the basics in the first year and allowing students to specialise later on.
- Open structure of the programme.
- International and diverse student cohort.
- Students taught by well qualified and experienced members of staff.
- Use of guest speakers to enrich the course and support its multidisciplinary character.
- Diversity of assessment types.
- Opportunity to undertake an internship.

- Friendly environment, conducive to studying and enabling students to forge bonds between them.
- Programme seems to be very well-developed, managed and run efficiently.

Weaknesses

- Overall, the number of students on the course appears to be rather small.
- Too heavily focused on the legal perspective to human rights.
- The distinction between the various approaches in social sciences seems to go amiss as they appear to be bundled up.
- The distinction between modules does not appear to be always clear-cut.
- It is suggested that some of the titles of the modules be amended to better reflect the content of these modules.
- A solid research methods module appears to be necessary for the completion of a research master dissertation and, possibly, further academic work.
- Some modules appear to lack internal coherence mainly due to the use of internal and external guest speakers.
- The feedback provided by lecturers seems to be of varied quality.
- More attention could be paid to supporting the students looking for internships.
- There also appears to be some problems with space in the sense that either there are not enough available rooms for students to study or the rooms are not spacious enough.
- The lack of podcasts and generally the lack of use of modern technology in applied teaching can be seen as a weakness.

Opportunities

- It would be good if students were told that should they be interested to visit The Hague, Strasbourg or Geneva in order to not only bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world but also to improve social relations among themselves, the managers are happy to support them with recommendations and contacts.
- Given the quality of the master programme and the number of students applying for it we would recommend the managers to increase the number of students enrolled on the programme.
- Where possible, the presence of two staff members in the room might assist the students in understanding the various perspectives on human rights issues, deploying different disciplines' skills and knowledge.
- The programme would benefit from highlighting more effectively its interdisciplinary features.
- To foster a more interdisciplinary approach the programme managers could help organise brown bags around topics that can be viewed from a variety of disciplines.
- The research methods module (HUMR5191: 'Human Rights Methodology: Research, Analysis and Thesis') ought to be placed closer to the master thesis.
- We recommend that all optional modules be offered at all times.
- We recommend the programme managers to organise an away day for staff members, as mentioned on page 23 of the internal evaluation report, to discuss and revise the programme in light of changes in the education business and trends in human rights.

- A number of elements that one would expect to be covered in a research methods module are missing.
- The programme should try to increase the number of agreements concerning internship places with partner institutions, NGOs, law firms or companies.
- To improve the attendance rate the programme managers might consider a range of options so as to involve the students even further in the delivery of the modules.
- As feedback is essential for students to improve upon their knowledge of human rights issues and their skills it ought to be standardised and detailed, in a single feedback sheet template.

Threats

- There are four elements we consider to be potential threats to the master programme: the relatively high drop-out rate; the lack of an additional solid, foundational skills modules; the poor set of information on postgraduate destinations (eg employability and career); and the use of PhD candidates to teach master students who might need support in teaching and training.

Strengths

The Programme

The three key strengths of the programme are its multidisciplinary approach, its structure and its ability to draw an international and diverse cohort of students.

A Multidisciplinary Programme

The programme is clearly geared towards providing students with an overview of human rights issues, espousing a multidisciplinary approach. Indeed, the breadth of choices of modules is evidence to the dedication and willingness of the programme managers to offer students the opportunity to learn (more) about the legal, philosophical, sociological and political context in which human rights issues are raised.

Modules are offered in a variety of fields such as law, philosophy, anthropology and social sciences. The modules in themselves offer a varied approach to specific topics (eg HUMR5702 'Human Rights and Development: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Theory and Practices') and this is notably made possible by the use of guest-speakers. Overall, there is enough depth and breadth in these modules to signpost them as multidisciplinary.

In particular, the opportunity for students to take courses (sometimes after seeking approval) in other departments, faculties, and even universities (eg MSc in Human Rights and Multiculturalism at the University College of Southeast Norway in Drammen) shows that the flair of the programme is undoubtedly multidisciplinary. The eclectic range of dissertation topics is also testament to such an endeavour.

The programme must be commended for espousing such an approach as most postgraduate studies offered in the field of human rights almost exclusively focus on the law relating to human rights. There is indeed a wealth of LLM programmes in human rights law offered in English language in various European countries. Only a few programmes offer an interdisciplinary approach, usually awarding a MA in Human Rights. The members of the Committee are not aware of any such programmes being embedded in a Law School/Faculty. This no doubt reveals the difficulty in crafting such a programme at the University of Oslo.

Structure of the Programme

The programme has been thoughtfully designed so as to impart the basics of human rights in the first two terms. It is indeed best that compulsory modules are scheduled early in the programme so as to set the overall tone and provide all the tools necessary for the students to perform well and fully enjoy the optional modules.

The open structure of the programme is also another key strength. It needs to stay as it would otherwise affect the multidisciplinary approach of the programme and deny students the opportunity to focus at a later stage (in Terms 2 and 3) on a particular approach. Students can tailor their studies and choose options that are closely related to their areas of interest. It might also affect recruitment in the longer term as the great majority of master programmes offer optional modules.

An International and Diverse Student Cohort

The well-balanced composition of the student cohort seems to be the result of two important factors. First, the programme, its structure and content, attracts an international and diverse

student cohort. Second, a careful and well-crafted recruitment process (with points allocated for motivation and experience, leading to a ranking system) allows the programme managers to select students who are not only of high academic standard but also who are motivated and have prior, relevant experience in the field. This blend of students is beneficial inasmuch as students who have just finished their undergraduate studies can assist students who have left university a while ago in improving on academic skills they might have used less in their jobs. Likewise students with field experience tend to share such experience with those who have just graduated, providing them with a more 'practice-based' approach to human rights. Such a combination is also likely to work well in a seminar setting where students exchange ideas and opinions on issues raised by the lecturer.

Moreover, the programme selection process allows for individuals with varied academic backgrounds to join the programme: The balance between international and national students is appropriate as well as is the balance between students with a social sciences background and those with another background such as law. This again reinforces the multidisciplinary approach of the programme.

Learning and Teaching

In terms of Learning and Teaching the two strong points of the programme are its teaching staff and the diversity of methods of assessments.

Teaching Staff

There is no doubt that students are taught by well qualified and experienced members of staff. Moreover the modules are taught by staff members and/or PhD candidates who are experts in their (research) fields and thus best placed to offer deeper insights into particular topics. Being taught by competent PhD candidates may also enamour students on the programme to later enrol on a PhD programme at the NHRC or the University of Oslo more generally.

The use of guest speakers, be they from other departments or faculties or from other institutions, not only enriches the module by bringing in a diversity of opinions and experiences but also supports the multidisciplinary character of the programme.

Assessments

Whilst a 4-hour examination enables students to demonstrate academic knowledge and rigour in the presentation of arguments it does not give students the chance to display other skills such as oral presentation or research skills. The diversity of the assessment types in the programme is therefore welcome. In particular the oral debate in HUMR5132 ('Human Rights Law in Context'), a compulsory module, will offer all students an opportunity to develop their oral and argumentative skills. These are skills that are particularly useful for human rights advocates and thus should be a part of an assessment in a compulsory module.

Providing feedback mid-term is important (see HUMR5140, HUMR5131, HUMR5702, HUMR5133) as it not only allows students to verify that they have understood the relevant concepts and principles and have acquired the skills required to write a good written piece but also staff members to gauge the level of the students and, accordingly, if necessary, adapt the content of the following sessions, leading up to the final paper, to the needs and level of the students.

Practice and Research

The ability of the programme to offer students an insight into practice as well as research, whilst also providing a linkage between them, is a positive feature of the programme.

HUMR4505 'Human Rights in Practice'

Probably one of the highlights of the programme is the opportunity for students to undertake an internship. First, the internship is embedded in a module, thereby incentivising (and not obliging as students can choose not to undertake an internship) students to seek an internship and do well in it as this will be reflected in their report. Moreover, as the module is compulsory, the internship forms an integral part of the learning process of students. This module offers students the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills acquired and improved upon in the various modules undertaken at the NHRC and other departments, faculties and universities to real, concrete situations. The assistance provided by the programme managers in finding suitable internships (14 internships are pre-arranged) must be commended too.

Research

The opportunity for students to share the preliminary results of their research with the Centre's research group provides them with a platform to submit their ideas and opinions to the scrutiny of fellow students but also more experienced academics. As a result, students taste what academic life can be like. It might also encourage them to opt to write a longer thesis and eventually apply for a PhD at the University of Oslo.

Student Environment and Facilities

A friendly environment, conducive to studying and enabling students to forge bonds between them is a key positive feature of the programme. For example the managers organise an away day when a new cohort of student join the programme. Further, student representatives (two for each cohort) help organising get-togethers for the students. There are also a number of opportunities offered by the university to socialise, especially at the beginning of the year with an introductory week.

Likewise students have access to good facilities such as the library of the NCHR and the University of Oslo more generally. In particular an introductory session on library and research skills is arranged for the students. This is all the more important as students come from diverse backgrounds, some of which might have not used such research facilities for a while if they have considerable work experience. A good drop in system to assist students as well as friendly staff are undoubtedly a positive aspect to ensure that students feel supported in their studies.

Further, we understand that great attention is paid to students' needs and interests. Also student representatives attend the meetings of the Education Committee. This all provides students with an educational environment where their voices are heard and concerns shared with the management and the staff of the programme.

Management of the Programme

The programme seems to be very well-developed, managed and run efficiently. The evaluations from the students and the external examiners demonstrate that the management is attentive to quality control and student feedback. For example, participation of students in the Education Committee meetings is helpful for the management to ensure that the programme meets the demands of the students (and thus attracts further students) whilst maintaining high academic standards.

Weaknesses

The Programme

Overall, the number of students on the course appears to be rather small. Given that there is a large choice of modules students can attend this appears at first sight rather surprising. That being said, this choice of limiting the number to 30 students might be due to the fact that the compulsory modules are only running once and teaching a group of 30 students at master level where discussions and interactions are a necessary component of the teaching and learning process may not be particularly welcome. We however understand that there are practical considerations that may hinder the increase in the number of students taken onto the programme.

At first sight, the programme seems to be heavily focused on the legal perspective to human rights. This is probably due to the fact that two of the compulsory modules contain the word 'law' and that the majority of the optional modules available are offered by the Law Faculty (14 according to the website) and the programme is part of the Law Faculty. In contrast, the NHRC only offers 7 non-law modules and 4 other such modules are offered in other departments. Yet, looking at the programme in more details it is technically possible to graduate with only one law module (HUMR5140 'Introduction to Human Rights Law') though the students would not have as much choice in terms of optional modules as other students.

There seems to be a divide between the legal on the one hand and the social, historical, political and philosophical approaches on the other. The distinction between the various approaches in social sciences seems to go amiss as they appear to be bundled up (at least in the presentation of the internal evaluation). The dichotomy law and social sciences appears unsatisfactory as it conveys the impression that all social sciences adopt similar positions and approaches and require the same set of skills.

Learning and Teaching

With regard to Learning and Teaching a number of issues relating to specific modules, teaching and assignments and feedback need to be mentioned.

Modules

Bearing in mind that we have not all seen the syllabus and the teaching materials of the modules (as this is an external evaluation of the programme rather than of the specific modules) our comments

on the modules might not provide a full, correct picture. Yet, we believe that enough information has been provided to impart some comments.

It appears that the distinction between modules is not always clear-cut. Whilst we acknowledge that overlaps cannot be avoided and in fact are often not only necessary but also vital to stress and reinforce (especially if used in a different context) certain concepts and principles of human rights, we believe that three of the five core modules overlap to a certain extent. These are HUMR5131 ('Introduction to the History, Philosophy and Politics of Human Rights'), HUMR5132 ('Human Rights Law in Context') and HUMR5140 ('Introduction to Human Rights Law'). In this order, the modules almost feel like a gradation, from the less to the more (socio)-legal, from the more contextual to the more technical. If such a gradation is indeed the aim, students will not realise it as they are all taught concurrently in Term 1. The fact that additional seminars for four of the compulsory modules (see page 5 of the Q&A document) need to be run shows that too much information is crammed into these modules. It is thus suggested that the content of these modules be rethought and redrafted.

As some modules (eg HUMR5134 'The Right to Peace') are only offered on specific semesters and years some students might not be able to choose them. The lack of a module that offers a regional, comparative perspective on human rights has also been noted as a weakness of the programme. Whilst we understand that the module on human rights in Asia is offered in relation to the three international programmes (Vietnam, Indonesia and China) we would recommend a module on human rights in Europe, where about half of the students are from, to be offered. It is suggested that some of the titles of the modules be amended to better reflect the content of the modules.

What is more there seems to be little training in research methods that includes empirical research skills such as interviewing skills, use of statistics, use of survey, research ethics, etc. A solid research methods module appears to be necessary for the completion of a research master dissertation and, possibly, further academic work. Also it would enable an increased dialogue between the law-oriented study of human rights and the quantitative literature on human rights that is mostly found in political science.

Teaching

Whilst attendance of compulsory modules is generally quite high that of electives appears lower. Attendance in class is likely to have some bearing on the discussions in the class and, of course, the atmosphere in class.

Some modules appear to lack internal coherence mainly due to the use of internal and external guest speakers. That up to 7 lecturers can be involved in the delivery of a module is rather concerning as it is extremely difficult for the module leader to coordinate them and ensure that the module appears coherent to the students. Unless links are properly established between the various sessions and the speakers students are likely to view these sessions as disparate elements and might then pick and choose to attend some rather than other sessions. It is recommended that the links between the sessions be spelled out to the students and that the recurring and overarching themes be reiterated, using different examples, perspectives, etc. This issue has already been noted in the internal evaluation report. Whilst we understand that it is the responsibility of the module leader to ensure the coherence of the course and the avoidance of unnecessary overlap (as explained on page 6 of the Q&A document) the programme managers should cast a second eye on modules that are highlighted by students as being a patchwork of perspectives.

Assignments and Feedback

The feedback provided by lecturers seems to be of varied quality. The external examiner has on numerous occasions explained that it was difficult to understand how marks had been allocated. Surely, this should not be the case.

Practice and Research

More attention could be paid to supporting the students looking for internships. This includes identifying appropriate and relevant internships, applying for such internships and being prepared for interviews for such internships. The members of the Committee however understand the challenges involved in ensuring there are enough internships for all students. In particular the Committee acknowledges that obtaining internships is a highly competitive process and that students on the programme are in fact looking for internships available to students from all around the world. It is thus recommended that the managers of the programme try to have more institutional agreements to ease the process. Also it is recommended that the workings of the module be explained to the students at an early stage of the programme so that students are not anxious about the completion of the module.

The lack of a field trip to link the classroom to the real world is also a weakness of the programme. We however understand that this is due to financial constraints. Yet, we wonder whether time and resource could be diverted from other activities in planning towards such a field trip. From personal experience such trips have contributed vastly both to the learning outcome of the difference courses as well as to the camaraderie and sense of belonging.

Student Environment and Facilities

There appears to be some problems with space in the sense that either there are not enough available rooms for students to study or the rooms are not spacious enough. We however understand that from 2016 onwards elective courses will be taught in larger rooms (see page 5 of the Q&A document) and welcome this change.

The lack of podcasts and generally the lack of use of modern technology in applied teaching can be seen as a weakness in a world where students are constantly surrounded by such technology. Podcasts allow students to go over concepts and principles they might have not well understood in the lecture. It also acts as a comfort blanket for many students when they prepare for the examinations. It is good to know that from 2016 onwards as classes of optional modules will be moved to larger rooms there will be a possibility to record the lectures and that the Asbjørn Eide Seminar Room will be upgraded to maybe enable podcasts (depending on financial means available). A note of caution must be sounded with regard to recordings of lectures by individual students who share them through Fronter. If the lectures are interactive and thus students can be heard on the recordings there might be some issue with data protection and students' consent.

Opportunities

General

It would be good if students were told that should they be interested to visit The Hague, Strasbourg or Geneva in order to not only bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world but also to improve social relations among themselves, the managers are happy to support them with recommendations and contacts. Students could maybe attend a trial, a committee session, etc. We understand that there are indubitably costs involved in such a trip and that these cannot be covered by programme funding. Yet, the programme management might assist in organising such a trip, should the students be interested.

Recruitment and Expansion

With regard to the recruitment of students we are pleased to know that the level of English proficiency has increased. Students with better English language skills tend to perform better as they will better understand the exam and coursework questions and be able to undertake research in a wider array of topics.

Given the quality of the master programme and the number of students applying for it we would ideally recommend the managers to increase the number of students enrolled on the programme. 20-30 students appear to be a small cohort especially as the programme offers a wide range of optional modules and could thus cater for more students. Moreover the enlargement of the cohort will lead to a wider pool of alumni who will be able to spread word about the quality of the programme and thus encourage further excellent candidates to apply as well as assist current students in finding internships and eventually jobs in the field of human rights. The impact of such an expansion would however be felt on the compulsory modules and undoubtedly on all types of resources deployed in this programme. Under these circumstances, three of the compulsory modules would need to run twice as the students would have to be divided into two smaller groups. Running interactive sessions with over 30 students in a room is tricky. Also this would take more of the staff's time, both in the lectures and outside as they will be meeting more students. Facilities would have to improve too all the more as issues have already surfaced with regard to the inadequacy of some lecture and study rooms. Certainly, any decision on increasing the number of students must be carefully planned and budgeted. The practicalities of this are however beyond the mandate of this Committee and as a result this is only a suggestion, rather than a recommendation.

Likewise, the suggestion to create and offer new modules as mentioned on page 23 of the internal evaluation report must be thoroughly thought through. An increased number of modules means that less students will opt for optional modules that might have been successful in the past. Any new module created will impact on the more established modules. With only 30 students per year and the *de minimis* rule of 10 students on average to keep a module the programme managers might be left in a position where a number of modules will fail to retain enough students to be kept on offer. However if the number of students on the programme were increased this problem is unlikely to emerge. It might also be that some modules are not 'fashionable' anymore and will die off on their own to be later replaced by new ones.

As mentioned on page 22 of the internal evaluation report, establishing joint degrees with other institutions or exchange is an excellent idea but it comes with a note of caution as it might be difficult to run them in practice if compulsory modules are spread over several terms, thereby preventing students from moving institutions. This could be avoided if the same or equivalent compulsory modules were available and recognised at a partner university. Bearing in mind the flexibility shown by the programme managers in allowing students to undertake modules in other universities, this should nevertheless be feasible.

Programme

The programme would benefit from highlighting more effectively its interdisciplinary features as well as from being better structured and monitored.

Interdisciplinary Programme

The general feeling is that the programme is multi-, rather than interdisciplinary. Whilst a multidisciplinary approach is to be welcome as it enables students to understand the various aspects of human rights, a broader, more interdisciplinary approach might be warranted.

The fact that separate committees are deployed to mark papers because they deal with different disciplines is testament to this lack of interdisciplinary. In the instance where the module leader is unable to provide expert knowledge and skills in all disciplines the programme managers might consider appointing a second-marker. Ideally, to ensure interdisciplinary the managers might want to appoint two markers per module where such modules are earmarked as multi-/interdisciplinary.

In fact the presence of two staff members in the room might assist the students in understanding the various perspectives on human rights issues, deploying different disciplines' skills and knowledge. It might indeed not be cost-effective in terms of the time of the staff involved but such sessions could be run only twice or three times per module on specific topic/issues where students need to better grasp the multi- and interdisciplinary aspects of the question. Also it would provide students with the opportunity to apply discreet sets of skills, peculiar to each discipline. For the modules offered in the Law Faculty it might be appropriate to involve a practitioner in the drafting and delivery of the module. Whilst it might not reduce the legal perspective adopted by the module it will make it more palpable for students with no or little background in law. Likewise law students taking this module should gain from the presence of a practitioner in terms of knowledge and skills.

To foster a more interdisciplinary approach the programme managers could help organise brown bags around topics that can be viewed from a variety of disciplines. Such informal seminars would work as a platform not only to exchange ideas but also learn from other disciplines and share good practice as well as relevant skills. The informal setting would thus be more conducive to question tools used in specific disciplines and allow students to ask questions that they might find 'silly' to ask in an assessed module. They might further stimulate a pattern of social interaction that appears to be missing at times and reduce insecurity amongst students. Such brown bags sessions could be kicked off by a panel of staff members talking about the same topic but from different disciplines, eg migration crisis in Europe or by a film that triggers a discussion (various lists of international law movies have been compiled and are available on the internet, see eg <http://opiniojuris.org/2016/02/10/international-law-movies/>, <http://iiljfilms.blogspot.co.uk/>).

Structure of the Programme

There is a general understanding that the research methods module (HUMR5191: ‘Human Rights Methodology: Research, Analysis and Thesis’) assists students in formulating their research proposal for the master thesis. As this module works as support for the master thesis, encouraging students to plan the thesis in advance and focusing their minds on it at an early stage, it ought to be placed closer to the master thesis. It might be more judicious to insert it as a compulsory module in Term 3 so as to make this link between the thesis and the research methods course stronger. It might also incidentally ensure that students still view themselves as the same cohort that started with Term 1 as they would have a common module in Term 3 rather than only optional modules. The programme would then run in the following manner:

4. semester	HUMR5200 - Thesis in the Theory and Practice of Human Rights		
3. semester	HUMR5191 - Human Rights Methodology: Research, Analysis and Thesis	Elective course	Elective course
2. semester	HUMR4504 - Human Rights in Practice	Elective course	Elective course
1. semester	HUMR5140 - Introduction to Human Rights Law	HUMR5131 - Introduction to the History, Philosophy and Politics of Human Rights	HUMR5132 - Human Rights Law in Context
	10 ECTS credits	10 ECTS credits	10 ECTS credits

Monitoring of the Programme

We recommend the programme managers to organise an away day for staff members, as mentioned on page 23 of the internal evaluation report, to discuss and revise the programme in light of changes in the education business and trends in human rights. These meetings are likely to give staff the opportunity to discuss feedback, alternative teaching methods such as flipped classrooms and the use of modern technology, etc. Owing to the two-year structure of the programme it is imperative to take stock at least every second year.

Learning and Teaching

There are a number of opportunities in relation to learning and teaching, mostly focused on specific modules and, to a lesser extent, on assessments and feedback.

Modules

We recommend that all optional modules be offered at all times.

There are two issues with regard to the modules offered on the programme that could be improved. The first one relates to the previously noted overlap of content in the compulsory modules taught in

Term 1 and the second relates to the module HUMR5191 ('Human Rights Methodology: Research, Analysis, and Thesis').

The module HUMR5131 ('Introduction to the History, Philosophy and Politics of Human Rights') should remain the same as it imparts an essential overview of human rights and is therefore a necessary and excellent introduction to a master programme in human rights. However, the two other modules appear to have considerable overlap. It is consequently suggested that one focuses on what human rights are and another on how human rights are protected.

The first module could focus on the substantive rights but also discuss universalism v regionalism, individual and collective rights, generations and interrelationship of rights, human rights duties, etc. It could pick on some rights such as minority rights, principle of non-discrimination, etc.

The second module would be more looking at the various systems of protection of human rights, on the national, regional and international levels. The focus would be on the mechanisms which would include not only human rights law but also international humanitarian law and international criminal law systems as well as the work of the United Nations via the Security Council, the Special Rapporteurs, the Human Rights Council, etc. In terms of skills, this module could act as a vector for conveying legal skills. At the same time as it would slowly introduce legal skills in the programme it might inspire students who have not studied law before to take one of the modules offered by the Law Faculty.

As explained before, a number of elements that one would expect to be covered in a research methods module are missing. It is thus suggested that either the module be more focused on research methods and act less as a support for the thesis or an advanced research skills module be offered. In the case of the former, this change in focus and thus negative impact on the thesis preparation might be mitigated by a dissertation module that runs a couple of lectures in Term 3, focusing on topics for research, research skills, literature review, bibliography, etc. Students could also be asked to submit in preparation of their thesis a set of documents such as a research question, a literature review, a bibliography, etc. to demonstrate that they are on track with the thesis. Alternatively, the current module could be clearly earmarked as a platform for thesis preparation and an additional module on research methods created. Such a module would be particularly useful to students who wish to carry out empirical research for the thesis, write a longer thesis or later apply for a PhD.

The module HUMR5145 'Human Rights in Asia' offers a regional approach. However, given that the programme is offered in Europe, a 'Human Rights in Europe' module might be more appropriate unless the reason for the existence of this module is that it prepares students for some of the internships offered by the NHRC. The programme managers might consider creating a comparative and interdisciplinary 'regional human rights theory, law and mechanisms' module. It would be the platform for a solid discussion on universalism v regionalism, individual v collective rights, etc. as well as regional idiosyncrasies in the mechanisms of protection of human rights.

[HUMR4504 'Human Rights in Practice'](#)

As much as this module is the highlight of the programme it also suffers from a number of flaws that however can be remedied. First, the programme might want to continue its excellent work in officialising more internship opportunities with partner institutions, NGOs, law firms or companies (all the more as it offers module HUMR5133 'Business and Human Rights'). Maybe the AHRI network

could be used with this aim. Students with poor time management skills are likely to miss the deadlines with human rights institutions and might thus need to be reminded of such deadlines. Others will not be able to secure an internship for the required period of time or for the appropriate length of time. In this respect, we welcome the inclusion of the NCHR *amicus curiae* team within the module which can provide research assistance to organisations and persons who are working in the field of human rights.

Attendance

To improve the attendance rate the programme managers might consider a range of options so as to involve the students even further in the delivery of the modules. Given the fact that compulsory attendance of courses at the University of Oslo might be quite difficult to enforce we suggest that the programme explores the following possibilities:

- to oblige students to attend a certain percentage of classes to take the exam. It goes without saying that exceptional circumstances such as bereavement must be taken into consideration when assessing whether a student has attended enough classes to sit the exam.
- to introduce an element of attendance in the assignment by requiring students to write a reflective log on their experience in one of the sessions, to submit a document that was started as part of a group exercise in the class, to do a group presentation (that is assessed) at one of the sessions, etc.
- to link the final assessment to the work carried out in the sessions. Students are informed at the beginning of each session that it is relevant for a particular part of the coursework. This works particularly well when the assessment is in the form of a problem-question with each question dealing with a separate issue. This has proved successful at the University of the West of England.
- to let the students own the session in the sense that students are asked each week to make a short presentation on an issue that happened that week and which is of relevance to the module. It is not assessed. At the University of Middlesex it has been rather successful in bringing more people in. It is also possible to use simulations in classes such as the simulation of a real world debate for which students need to prepare in advance as this is done at the University College London. Another way to engage the student is to give them in the seminar a task that is related to the assessment (eg researching the primary and secondary sources relevant for the coursework) as it is done at the University of the West of England.

Assessments and Feedback

Whilst we acknowledge that academic rigour must be demonstrated and this is probably best done by way of examinations, though not exclusively, students are also required to demonstrate research skills at master level. We understand that the assessment methods in the Faculty of Law cannot be revised by the programme managers and thus would recommend that they turn their attention to the assessments of the modules offered by the NHRC. As the master programme aims to impart knowledge in the field of human rights as well as enable students to work in this area the programme managers might consider examining whether the assessments also reflect this approach.

For example, the students could be asked to write a national human rights programme, a NGO submission to the Human Rights Council as part of the Universal Periodic Review, etc. or do an oral presentation. The programme managers might want to investigate the possibility to set up group presentations or group work where marks are allocated as a group and as individuals. This would again foster closer bonds between the students whilst making them understand that they can play to their strengths whilst learning from each other (all the more as the programme is multidisciplinary).

We understand that the marking criteria are included in all course webpages and available on the website. Yet, we believe that in order to ensure that students are aware against which criteria their work is marked and are thus less likely to seek further feedback or raise issues with their marks the criteria could be spelled out in the module handbook and maybe be part of a discussion in the class. For example students could be provided with the work of a former student and asked to peer-review it, using the marking criteria. Likewise students could be asked to comment on a mock presentation made by or a piece of coursework drafted by the lecturer. Carefully crafted such a presentation or piece of coursework could highlight some of the common issues such as lack of references, poor argumentative skills, lack of clear structure, lack of a solid introduction, plagiarism, etc.

Further, the way feedback is given as well as communicated to students appears to be inconsistent. First, students only receive feedback if they ask for it. Second, whilst we understand that staff make themselves available to students to provide feedback, this also means that feedback can take various forms: oral and written feedback and be done via email, on phone or by appointment. As feedback is essential for students to improve upon their knowledge of human rights issues and their skills it ought to be standardised and detailed, in a single feedback sheet template. We acknowledge that detailed feedback cannot be provided on examination papers. However, for pieces of coursework, especially for mid-term papers, it is suggested that the students receive a copy of their work, annotated and with a form not only specifying the criteria but also in which regard the student has or not fulfilled them. This would also meet the demands of some students for the feedback to be given anonymously as pieces of coursework would only refer to the student's registration number. This system would also relieve staff of having to arrange for meetings with students and provide oral feedback, unless, it goes without saying, the student wishes that feedback be clarified or expanded upon. This system would also help the external examiner determine whether the marks have been appropriately awarded. There are several suggestions for feedback form:

Proposal 1: presentation, bibliography and referencing; structure and research question; content and quality of research; English language and style; additional comments and suggestions for improvement;

Proposal 2: Ability to identify key concepts and legal issues relevant to the question; Understanding and accuracy of legal content; Critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis; Originality and creativity; Research process and presentation (including bibliography). (See Annex 1)

Threats

There are four elements we consider to be potential threats to the master programme: the relatively high drop-out rate, the lack of an additional solid, foundational skills modules, the lack of information on postgraduate destinations and the use of PhD candidates to teach master students who might need support in teaching and training.

Recruitment and Drop-Out Rates

The relatively high number of drop outs for such a selective course (on page 15 of the internal evaluation report) is concerning though we understand that it is not linked to the programme management at all. 20% of 20-30 students appears to be a significant number of students. As there is already a high number of applicants to the programme (about 700 per year over the last few years) and only 20-30 are accepted, there is certainly room for offering more spaces, at least on a waiting list. Knowing that about 20% of those offered spaces will not pursue their studies to the end, the programme managers might want to offer for examples 35 spaces with the aim of filling in in concrete terms 30 of them. This 20% drop-out rate should be considered in any recruitment process. In any case it must be established why such a high number of students is dropping out. If most of them drop out even before they are enrolled on the programme then there is no cause of concern. However, if such a drop out occurs after the student have formally registered with the retention this is more problematic. The retention rate is usually around 90% at master level. Have such students been met with the programme managers to discuss alternative arrangements? Have such students been offered to continue their studies on a part-time basis? Have such students been informed that they can suspend their studies for up to two terms to come back later?

Skills Courses

A recurrent issue in the feedback provided by the students as well as a point identified by all members of the Committee is the need to enhance and develop skills modules on the master programme. As the programme is multidisciplinary and recruits students with diverse academic backgrounds it is recommended that the programme ensures that all students are given the chance to learn or improve upon skills that are specific to some disciplines. Since we understand that a pure skills module might not be feasible from a staff perspective and not welcome by all students as being too technical and maybe 'boring' we would recommend that crash courses be offered at the beginning of the programme. Such courses might form part of a welcome week where students are introduced to the NHRC, the library and its database, etc. They do not need to be long but could take the form of a two-hour introduction to a specific skill. For example, students could be given a couple of court cases and the lecturer could show how the judgment is structured, what dissenting opinions are, where the relevant information is located in the judgment, etc. As a result of this lack of skill courses the students are likely to stay in their comfort zone and opt for modules that are in the same discipline as their undergraduate studies. This is missing the point of a multidisciplinary programme which should encourage students to espouse a broader view of human rights issues. For those students who are interested in developing the relevant skills for employability purposes, the programme management might wish to indicate that such modules are available in other departments and faculties of the University and can be chosen after having sought approval from the programme management.

Employability

On page 23 of the internal evaluation report the programme managers mention the need to acquire more information on graduate career trajectory. This kind of information is indeed vital to gather because it will help advertise and eventually sell the programme to a wider audience. We thus welcome the fact that the programme managers have set up a Facebook page and are currently looking into setting up an official LinkedIn account for the alumni and monitoring more closely their career path. The reason why this discussion is placed in the 'Threats' rather than 'Opportunities' section is because a growing number of master programmes are advertising their employability rate (in addition to the odd description of a former student who acts as a showcase on the website of the programme) and this needs to be borne in mind when advertising the programme to international students in particular. The higher the chances to be in employment after studying on the master programme the more likely students are going to apply for it. Though it might not be a threat at this stage as the programme is attracting an extremely healthy number of potential candidates it might in the long term if employability rates are more widely advertised by master programmes around the world.

PhD Candidates as Teaching Staff

We note that 'there has been an increased tendency in the last years to involve more PhD candidates at the Centre in the teaching process' (page 11 of the internal evaluation report). As acknowledged earlier, the involvement of PhD candidates in the teaching of modules on the programme can be beneficial. However, we would recommend that they be properly trained in Teaching and Learning skills. It is unclear to the members of the Committee whether they have received such training, whether their teaching is monitored (whilst they are in the room, teaching), whether they receive feedback on their teaching and thus can improve upon their performance or whether they can be removed from teaching should they fail to deliver competent lectures. Students attending the master programme are likely to have chosen it because of its reputation and the quality of its staff and thus high standards have to be maintained at all times. Some students might also feel that they did not choose to pursue a postgraduate education to be taught by other postgraduate students.

Annex 1



University of the
West of England

LLM: MARKING AND FEEDBACK SHEET FOR COURSEWORK

MODULE TITLE:

CANDIDATE NUMBER:

Grading Scale: Distinction 70% Merit 60% Pass 50%
1. Ability to identify key concepts and legal issues relevant to the question
<i>For example, recognition of the parameters of the task (the legal and contextual issues), rationale for the prioritisation of certain issues, clear and logical structure to the response and close correlation between question and response. (Fulfilment of these criteria will usually be evidenced in the introduction).</i>
First Marker's comments
Second Marker's comments
2. Understanding and accuracy of legal content
<i>For example, relevant primary and secondary legal sources identified accurately, ability to summarise and explain the law and communicate doctrinal arguments succinctly rather than by extensive quotation from statutes or cases.</i>
First Marker's comments
Second Marker's comments
3. Critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis
<i>For example, evidences a capacity to identify complexity and uncertainty in the law, to examine and appraise the comparative merits of different legal arguments advanced by others (evidence of wider reading) assess proposals for reform, and to recognise contextual arguments relevant to the question, to reach conclusions that are summative, logical and persuasive (i.e. based on the analysis and evaluation presented).</i>
First Marker's comments
Second Marker's comments
4. Originality and creativity
<i>For example, evidences an ability to independently appraise the knowledge base in order to identify new problems or areas for investigation, develop new perspectives or solutions for existing legal</i>

<i>problems.</i>	
First Marker's comments	
Second Marker's comments	
5. Research process and presentation	
<i>For example, clarity of expression, syntax, spelling, ability to follow legal conventions for citation and referencing of sources, and a complete bibliography and table of cases/statutory instruments.</i>	
First Marker's comments	
Second Marker's comments	
Marks	
Overall Mark:	Date:
First Marker	Second Marker